



Senate

Paper Title	Semester based examinations
Outcome requested	Senate is asked to discuss the possibility of introducing semester based examinations.
Points for Senate members to note and further information	<p>The possibility of offering examinations in both January and May was last discussed at QMUL in 2013-14. Feedback on the proposals was mixed but a number of schools and institutes have expressed an interest in offering semester based examinations, and the initiative is also supported by QMSU.</p> <p>Some key points from the previous consultation on semester based examinations are attached to facilitate discussion.</p>
Questions for Senate to consider	Should QMUL consider offering semester based examinations for the future?
Regulatory/statutory reference points	Academic Regulations, QMUL
Strategy and risk	2.01 Student Experience
Reporting/consideration route for the paper	n/a
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QMUL consulted on the possibility of offering semester based examinations as part of the wider assessment governance consultation in 2013-14. Key points emerging from the consultation were as follows:

Points in favour of semester based examinations included:

- reduction of the gap between learning and assessment;
- increased student satisfaction;
- clarity of submission and assessment points;
- a clear 'engagement point' to check on students' progress;
- students have the chance to try an examination before the end of the year;
- reduction in pressure on students at one point in the year.

Points against semester based examinations included:

- compartmentalisation of learning;
- impact on staff time;
- impact on the teaching calendar (extending semester two past Easter);
- the current gap between learning and assessment could be countered by increased use of coursework assessment for semester one modules.

Other points included:

- A-levels were moving away from January exams, and student would be used to end of year examinations;
- January exams would cause an increased demand for student support services in semester one, but a commensurate reduction in semester two, and the possible reduction of stress levels for students needing special arrangements as they would be used to them by May;
- possible reduction in students' engagement with non-academic activities (e.g. employability initiatives) if they are focused on assessment throughout the year;
- the Students' Union noted that it had repeatedly campaigned in favour of semester based examinations. In their most recent survey, 72 per cent of students favoured semester based examinations.

The Group noted that it was not possible to use a mixed system to allow January examinations for those schools that wanted them due to the impact on the teaching calendar, and particularly for students on joint honours programmes who might otherwise have teaching and examination commitments at the same time.

Since 2013-14, a number of schools and institutes have expressed an interest in piloting semester based examinations. There is a great deal of pressure on the existing system of examinations in May and June with 81,000 examinations taking place in a six week period. In addition to the problems with finding suitable venues, the time frame for marking, mark entry and examination boards prior to graduation is extremely tight.